MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF THE BABEMBA TRIBES

The tribe in question is that of the Babemba. The Babemba have their own history, thus it is an important tribe. They claim to have come originally from the Lunda kingdom. It is well known that the Lunda, situated on the upper reaches of the Kasaï River, a tributary of the Congo, is one of the biggest and most powerful negro kingdoms of Africa. The Balunda established their rule over all the neighboring tribes, thus founding three big colonies which go by the name of Baluba. The first of these colonies was established at the source of the Zambezi River, partly in Portuguese Angola, partly in British Northern Rhodesia. This first colony was later conquered by the Matabeles who had originally come from Zululand. It took the name of Barotseland. The second Baluba colony was established further east between the Kasaï and Sankuru rivers, while the third of the Baluba colonies settled on the banks of the Lualaba, another tributary of the Congo. The Babemba (Baluba) came from this last colony.

Their migration took place about 200 years ago. The story of this migration is one of the most impressive in history. The exodus lasted for nearly ten years— the tribe first crossed the Luapula, Chambezi and Luangwa rivers; but then they turned back and again crossed the Chambezi River further north, and finally settled on the banks of the Karungu River, nine kilometers (five and a half miles) north of the present-day missionary settlement of Malole. There they came upon a related tribe by the name of Babemba. The Baluba superseded them entirely by appropriating their territory and bringing them into subjection. The two races soon merged. The Baluba ceased to be Baluba and were henceforth called Babemba.

Since their exodus from Baluba, the Babemba have had about thirty kings, each with his history—and a glorious history at that. The most illustrious page in their history describes their wars with the invading hordes of the Baangonis of Zulu origin. While all the neighboring tribes yielded and paid tribute to the Baangoni, the Babemba gloriously withstood the terrible assaults of the formidable enemy. The war lasted for ten years (from 1860 to 1870). Finally, in the course of a decisive battle the Babemba won complete victory. Sungadiaba, the great Mungoni chieftain, died from grief over this defeat. His army was completely disorganized, and the

601 [605] sister's child or the mother's brother's child. Cross-cousin marriage is, as has been said, the preferential marriage, and joking relationships exist between a man and his female cross-cousins on either side.

In the first ascending generation, a man uses the term *tata* for his own father, his father's brothers, real and classificatory, and the husband of a woman whom he calls mother. He uses the term *mayo* for his own mother and her sisters, real or classificatory. He distinguishes his father's sister by a special term, *mayo senge*, from his mother's sisters and the mother's brother by a separate term, *yama*, from his father's brother. In the first descending generation, there is a common term, *mwana*, used for both sexes, but a man calls the children of his sister by a special term, *mwipwa*, and a woman calls the children of her brother either *mwipwa* or *mwana senge*.

In the second ascending generation there is a common term, *shikulu*, for the paternal and maternal grandfathers, real or classificatory, and *mama* for grandmother. In the second ascending generation the same term, *mweshikulu*, is used for boys and girls, whether the children of daughters or the children of sons. The common term, *bukwe*, is used for spouses and members of the *lupwa*, although there is a special term for sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, *shifyala* or *nafyala*. These terms are used reciprocally.

CHANGES IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY DUE TO EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

797 177 Changes in marriage and the family have resulted both from the teaching of Christian missions and also because of the absences of adult males, who leave home to earn the means wherewith to pay tax and buy European goods. Missionary teaching has, as in other areas, been directed against the practice of polygyny and divorce. Missionaries have also opposed the practice of giving young girls to their husbands before puberty. They have endeavoured also to eradicate the magical attitudes towards sex and fire, described in a later section - attitudes which form one of the sanctions of marriage morality. They have been largely successful in their attempt to prevent the celebration of girls' initiation ceremonies (*cisungu*

797 177 585 Native marriage is recognised in this area. The British South Africa Company recognised the Native Customary Law from the start and administered it through district magistrates' courts with the aid of Bemba assessors. Simultaneously the Missions instituted various Christian ceremonials in which a restricted(1) form of traditional marriage ceremony was carried out. With the institution in 1929 of Native Courts of Law, all civil actions arising out of marriage were referable to them and not to a European Magistrate. An early missionary claim to regulate marriages was quashed in 1934. Native marriages may now be registered.

LABOUR MIGRATION

167 464 Although it is generally recognized that labour migration has been an

(1) Without initiation rites and full ceremonial, e.g. post-initiation intercourse.

4:Whiteley E-4 (no date) 1950 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

increasingly potent cause of change in family structure and has affected many other institutions among the Bemba and other people in Northern Rhodesia, precise data in respect of migrants, their age, and tribal and territorial distribution are not available. Estimates prepared for the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Financial and Economic Position of Northern Rhodesia give the following average number of Northern Rhodesian African workers in European employment:-(1)

	In Northern Rhodesia	*Outside Northern Rhodesia*	*Total*
1927	43,314	36,873	80,187
1936	53,462	51,212	104,674

The Report points out that the figure of those employed outside Northern Rhodesia, i.e. in Southern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, the Rand and the Congo, is an under-estimate and that the actual number is probably considerably higher. As the total number of tax-paying males is estimated at 268,000, of whom not more than 170,000 are fit for hard manual labour, the high incidence of migrancy becomes self-evident.

The Report states that "it is certain that the local economic opportunities are insufficient and that money can for the large majority only be earned by going abroad."(2) While it is clear that there are other motives, such as love of adventure, or family tensions, underlying the decision to engage in migrant labour, economic pressure is the overriding cause. The actual incidence of migrancy varies widely, depending on local economic conditions; districts situated along the railway lines or, as in part of the Northern Province, where income can be obtained from fishing, having generally a smaller proportion of migrants.

The length of time the men are away from home probably varies considerably, and here again, precise data are lacking. The mines around Ndola and at Broken Hill are the largest single employers of migrant labour. In 1936 they employed 15,137, which is 28.3% of the total number of Native workers employed in the Territory.

The following figures for the whole of the labour intake of the Northern Rhodesian mines give some idea of the overall picture in 1937:-

Period of Absence	*Percentage*	*Number*
Up to 6 months	43.98	8,372
6 months - 2 years	28.02	5,332
2 - 3 years	11.71	2,230
Over 3 years	16.28	3,097

The estimates given by District Commissioners of the proportion of adult males normally absent from their homes show a considerable variation in different districts, ranging from 12% in Mkushi to 40-70% in Mporokoso. The following are the estimates of male absentees in the three Northern

(1) Except where otherwise stated, these and other figures are from Pim, 1938, pp.35, 36, 357.

(2) ibid., p.37.

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Province districts in which the majority of the Bemba live:-(1)

Kasama	50%
Chinsali	29%
Mpika	30%

Estimates for other districts containing some Bemba are:-

Abercorn	49%
Isoka	Not given
Mporokoso	40-70%
Luwingu	20%

It must be stressed that these estimates are not based on precise data. But despite the fact that the figures are only approximate, the general conclusion as to the large extent of migrancy is not in doubt.

In 1937 the three districts(2) in which the majority of Bemba live contributed 21.9% (1937 men) of all Northern Province labour (8,752) to the Copperbelt, and 11.3% of the total labour force employed on the Copperbelt (17,128 men). The contribution of all districts containing some Bemba(3) represented 46.5% (4,071 men) of all Northern Province labour and 23.8% of all labour.

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Marriage and the family are affected by this high rate of migration of marriageable males. As in other parts of Africa where this system of migratory labour is prevalent, the absence of the man naturally leads to a loosening of the marriage tie. Women left alone for three or four years contract other unions in their husbands' absence. The amount of land that can be put under cultivation is also reduced and the economic condition of the wife and children is inevitably worsened. There are, however, certain factors inherent in the matrilineal system which do not apply in the patrilineal areas to the east and south. Bemba society does not recognise a stable residential unit based on the kinship of its male members as do the patrilineal Ngoni to the east, and the absentee men have fewer permanent ties to bind them to a particular village at home and seem to have a less developed sense of allegiance to such villages. Moreover, the marriage contract in this area depends, as we have seen, on the giving of service to the father-in-law rather than the payment of money or goods. This service cannot be given when the young husband is at the mines, and a small monetary payment of about 10/- is given in lieu. The whole process

(1) *The Annual Report on African Affairs* for 1948 gives the following figures for that year for the three Bemba districts:-

Individual District	*% taxable males absent*	*% employed in Northern Rhodesia*	*% employed outside Northern Rhodesia*
Kasama	53.55	17.06	36.49
Chinsali	39.54	10.74	28.8
Mpika	28.62	3.9	24.72
Average	40.47	10.56	30.00

(2) Kasama, Chinsali, Mpika.
(3) Kasama, Chinsali, Mpika, Abercorn, Isoka, Mporokoso, Luwingu.

by which a young son-in-law is gradually incorporated into his wife's group is therefore altered. The young wife remains behind with her own people and not with her in-laws and thus, perhaps, is in a happier position than she would be in a patrilineal society; but Read considers that the brides are better looked after among the patrilineal Ngoni, where a woman's in-laws have made a considerable marriage payment for her and conceive it to be their duty to look after her while her husband is away.(1)

AGE SETS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Age is not stressed as a principle of social grouping. Precedence is reckoned on the basis of seniority and, as among other peoples, there are special terms for the various stages of life, but there are no boys' initiation ceremonies and no regiments based on age such as are found among the Nilo-Hamitic groups in East Africa. The existence of certain occupational groups, as fishing communities, and of associations, such as those of iron-workers among the Aushi and Chishinga, has already been noted. While there are no secret societies among the Bemba, the Twa in the swamps of Bangweulu were renowned for *Butwa*, a secret society whose influence at one time extended the length of the Luapula river on both banks as far as Lake Mweru. Among the tribes affected by the cult were the Aushi, Unga, Shila, Tabwa in the group at present under consideration, and also the Lamba and Lunda.(2) It is suggested that in its original form *Butwa* is now extinct,(3) but it is uncertain whether it still exists in a modified form. Membership was not restricted by age or sex and people were initiated into the mysteries at a festival which lasted several days. The avowed aims of the society were to suppress selfishness and promote social life and its main attractions seem to have been dancing, singing, beer drinks and sexual licence; there was also considerable prestige attached to the ability to converse in the secret language *Lubendo*.

LOCAL AND TERRITORIAL GROUPING

The basic residential group is the village - a collection of 30 to 50 huts in the case of a commoner and several times this number in the case of a chief. All these peoples live in villages rather than isolated homesteads, but the size of the villages and their propinquity vary widely from area to area; Bemba villages, for instance, are often 16 to 20 miles apart.

The village normally develops as a kinship unit. It can come into existence when a middle-aged or elderly man feels he has a sufficient following of relatives to justify his application to the chief for permission to set up a community of his own. While it is generally built close to relatives, the abundance of land makes it possible to build anywhere within the chief's administrative district. The nucleus is the headman's own matrilocal extended family composed of his young married daughters and their children, together with members of his matrilineage such as his widowed sisters and their sons and daughters. The number of relatives attached to a headman varies with his popularity and efficiency. A man may also succeed to the headmanship of a village by taking the name of his maternal grandfather or maternal uncle by the *kupyanika* system already referred to (see p.15). A

(1) Quoted by Richards, 1940.
(2) Anon. N.A.D.A., 1948. (3) Brelsford, 5, 1946, p.14.

5:Slaski E-4 (no date) 1950 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

Luapula Peoples

Tabwa (Aitawa), Lungu, Bemba, and Aushi (including their off-shoots the Kawendi and Mukulo). In addition there are Bwile (Bwiri), Mambwe, Bisa, Ngumbo, Mukulu, Lala, Lamba, Lomotwa, Yeke (Nyamwezi) and Swahili elements. The presence of the Batembo pygmies, whom Maes and Boone(1) place just south of Lake Mweru on their tribal map of the region, is not confirmed by other authorities. The extent of tribal mixture is shown by the fact that the headmen of thirty-four villages in Kambwali's chiefdom belong to eleven different tribes. None of the tribes is indigenous to the valley. 166 619

The tribe, *mutundu* (pl. *mitundu*: the word is also used for a species of animal, bird or tree) or *mushyobo*, is not a descent group. Tribal allegiance, unlike clan affiliation, can be changed with residence. Though never in doubt about their clan, people may be uncertain as to their tribe. Inter-tribal differences in custom were never considerable. Neither physical type, form of settlement, nor language are now reliable indications of tribal origin. Certain characteristics are traditionally attributed to particular tribes: the Bemba are proverbially cruel, the Shila good fishermen and canoe-makers; the Tabwa are renowned as witches and for the beauty of their women,(2) the Lomotwa for their quarrelsomeness. In spite of territorial dispersion, members of a tribe consider themselves *lupwa lumo*, "of one stock". The chiefs of neighbouring tribes occasionally visit their former subjects established in Kazembe's country. 184 619 829

The Lunda possessed a special status and constituted a sort of nobility to which distinguished outsiders - non-Lunda chiefs and headmen - could be admitted by being invested with Lundahood (*ubulunda*). 619 565

DEMOGRAPHY

No estimates are available for the population in the valley on the western (Belgian Congo) side. On the eastern side in Northern Rhodesia it was estimated by Coxhead at 32,000 in 1914.(3) He made no attempt, however, to distinguish between the various tribal groups, referring to all the subjects of the Kazembe as "the Lunda". According to more recent estimates the eastern population approaches 50,000 and shows signs of rapid expansion. It is now concentrated in some 300 villages strewn along the Luapula by the trunk road built on the hard land next to the riverside swamps. No figures are available to indicate variations in the density of population, which must be very high locally as many of the villages adjoin one another forming a continuous row of habitations along the side of the road. 161

Except for missionaries there are no resident Europeans in Kazembe's kingdom. On Nkuba's side a group of colonial officials and traders live at Kasenga. 797

Mobility has always been high and numbers have fluctuated widely as a result of migrations due to wars and to the popularity of individual chiefs.(4) A large proportion of the population is said to have left the country during the reign of Keleka, the fourth Kazembe, remembered for his atrocities.(5) 167

(1) Maes and Boone, 1935, p.135.
(2) Livingstone, 1874, I, p.259.
(3) Coxhead, 1914, p.64.
(4) Livingstone, op.cit., p.254.
(5) Livingstone, op.cit., p.265.

167 The economic wealth of the valley makes it attractive to immigrants, increasingly numerous since the development of Katanga mining enterprises has created a ready market for the Luapula fish.

Labour Migration

A considerable and growing proportion of young men seek seasonal employment in the Copperbelt and, to a lesser extent, in the Katanga mines. It has been tentatively suggested that perhaps a quarter of the male taxable population is away at work.

HISTORY

174 The people at the court of the Kazembe struck Gamitto as historically-minded to an extent unparalleled in Central Africa.(1) Some of their traditions find support in those of other tribes and in the evidence of early travellers.

The pygmies, said to have been the first inhabitants, are particularly associated with Kilwa, where, according to tradition, all but two of them perished in a fire started unwittingly by Kaponto of *Bena Bumba* (Clay clan) who had come from the Upper Luapula. The country was gradually populated by small, self-contained groups, usually segments of matrilineal clans, which, led by their *fikolwe*, wandered in, mainly from the Luba country, in pursuit of game or in quest of new land. Among the first to come were *Bena Bumba* (Clay clan) from Matanda on the Upper Luapula, *Bena Lungu* (Calabash clan), *Bena Ntamba* (Tortoise clan), both from the Luba territories, and the now extinct *Bena Kansungwa*. *Bena Bwililile* ("people who eat on their own", i.e. owe no allegiance and pay no tribute), the general designation given to these groups by Nkuba's followers, is an allusion to their lack of political organisation. The first Nkuba, who had broken away from the Bemba, came to Lake Mweru apparently for ivory which was not valued by the local population.(2) He established a highly-organized kingdom which extended along the lower reaches of the Luapula (from Chibondo on the western and Lukwesa on the eastern bank) to the periphery of Lake Mweru. His people intermarried with the *Bena Bwililile* and their descendants became the *Bashila* (literally "fishermen") of the Lunda.

Higher up the valley were the autonomous chiefdoms of the *Bena Nsoka* (Snake clan), *Bena Nshe* (Locust clan), *Bena Ngoma* (Drum clan), *Bakunda* (Frog clan), *Bashimba* (Leopard clan) which successfully resisted Nkuba. Later arrivals from the west included the *Bena Mbeba* who came under Lubunda and the *Bena Nguni* (Bird clan). They had organized courts and a system of tribute and they erected *utwamba* huts to house the relics of their dead chiefs.

175 The Lunda from the empire of Muata Yamvo (also spelt Matianfa, Muata Yambo, Muata-Hianvo, Muata yi Nvo)(3) on the rivers Kasai and Luisa made their appearance around 1740.(4) The expedition was prompted by the desire

(1) Valdez, 1861, II, p.262. (2) Crawford, 2, p.254.
(3) Burton, op.cit., p.36: see also *The Southern Lunda and related peoples*, M. McCulloch, 1950, I.A.I. (4) Coxhead, op.cit., p.3.

7:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

(c) Economic Background. The Bemba are an agri-

cultural people

like most of the Central Bantu group to which they belong. They keep no cattle. Tsetse-fly at present prevents their keeping stock over most of the country, but in any case they seem to have no pastoral traditions, whatever they may have had formerly. Thus they have no means of storing wealth as have the Southern Bantu. Their marriage contracts are fulfilled by service and not by the passage of cattle. In the old days military glory and the extraction of tribute from conquered peoples seems to have been the dominant ambition of the Bemba chiefs, and their wealth consisted in the size of their following and the amount of service they were able to command. This fact profoundly influences their position at the present day (cf. p. 116).

The soil of most of this district is poor and it has not attracted white settlement. The staple crop is finger millet (*eleusine corecana*), while some kafir corn, a little maize, legumes, and pumpkins are also grown. The people practise shifting cultivation of a primitive type, and the plentiful supply of land and the lack of any localized natural resources which might attract the inhabitants to settle in one area rather than another all affect the political system. As has been shown, they decrease the strength of local ties as against political or kinship affiliations, and they account for the fact that the power to distribute land is not an important prerogative of leadership in distinction to conditions in most Southern Bantu tribes.

Hunting and fishing contribute a small share of the food-supply only. Organized marketing does not exist, and under modern conditions no cash crop has been found for this area. This fact, together with the absence of opportunities for local employment, forces the adult male population to look for work outside the tribal area, with resultant effects, as will be seen, on the political system of the tribe.

(*d*) *White Administration*. The type of white administration introduced in this area is described on pp. 112–20.

III. Bases of Authority

The positions of leadership in Bemba society consist of the following offices: (*a*) *territorial rulers* (chiefs and headmen); (*b*) *administrative officers and councillors*; (*c*) *priests, guardians of sacred shrines, and magic specialists with economic functions*; (*d*) *army leaders* in the old days. Succession to all these offices is